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SUBJECT: INR/NEA MIDDLE EAST ASSESSMENT

1. FOLLOWING FOR THE SECRETARY'S CONSIDERATION IS A JOINT INR/NEA ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE US IF SADAT PURSUES A BILATERAL PEACE AGREEMENT WITH ISRAEL.

2. BEGIN TEXT: THIS PAPER, UNDERTAKEN IN CONSULTATION WITH SEVERAL OF OUR AMBASSADORS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND IN MOSCOW, EXAMINES THE IMPLICATIONS OF A POSSIBLE DECISION BY PRESIDENT SADAT TO SEEK A BILATERAL PEACE AGREEMENT WITH ISRAEL. SINCE EVENTS COULD WELL EVOLVE IN SUCH A WAY THAT WE MIGHT BE CONFRONTED BY SUCH A SEPARATE AGREEMENT, IT SEEMS PRUDENT TO RE-EXAMINE THE PROPOSITION THAT NO ARAB GOVERNMENT COULD MAKE A SEPARATE
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PEACE WITH ISRAEL AND SURVIVE, AND ALSO TO ASSESS THE IMPLICATIONS OF SUCH A DEVELOPMENT FOR US INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

3. FOR THE SAKE OF ANALYSIS, IT IS USEFUL TO KEEP IN MIND TWO PATHS BY WHICH SADAT MIGHT DECIDE TO SEEK A SEPARATE AGREEMENT:
(1) HE COULD TRY TO NEGOTIATE A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT, AS HE HAS SAID HE WILL DO, AND RECEIVE FROM ISRAEL

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CONCESSIONS HE REGARDS AS SUFFICIENT TO ENABLE HIM TO
URGE THE OTHER CONFRONTATION STATES AND THE PALESTINIANS
TO JOIN THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS. IF THEY REFUSE TO DO
SO, HE COULD THEN PROCEED WITH A BILATERAL AGREEMENT,
CLAIMING THAT THE OTHER ARAB PARTIES HAD MISSED THE
OPPORTUNITY HE HAD OPENED FOR THEM AND EXPRESSING THE HOPE
THAT THEY WOULD JOIN HIM AT A LATER DATE.

(2) HE COULD MAKE AN EFFORT TO ACHIEVE A COMPREHENSIVE
SETTLEMENT BUT, RECEIVING TOO LITTLE FROM ISRAEL EXCEPT
IN THE SINAI, MOVE AHEAD WITH AN EGYPT-ISRAEL AGREEMENT.

4. SHOULD SADAT PURSUE A GENUINELY SEPARATE AGREEMENT,
THE IMPACT BOTH WITHIN EGYPT AND THE ARAB WORLD AS A WHOLE
WOULD DEPEND LARGELY ON WHICH OF THESE TWO PATHS HAD
BEEN FOLLOWED, I.E., WHETHER HE HAD BEEN ABLE TO OBTAIN
PLAUSIBLE CONCESSIONS FROM ISRAEL ON THE OTHER FRONTS.
THE ESSENCE OF HIS STRATEGY MUST BE THIS: HE CAN AFFORD
IF NECESSARY TO LEAVE SYRIA OUT IF THE SYRIANS PROVE
DIFFICULT PROVIDING HE CAN SHOW SOMETHING FOR THE
PALESTINIANS. THUS THE PALESTINIANS, PARTICULARLY BECAUSE
OF SAUDI CONCERN FORTHEIRFATE, BECOME THE CRUX OF HIS
STRATEGY. HE HAS THUS INSISTED THAT FIRST PRIORITY BE
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GIVEN TO THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE, AND IF HE COULD OBTAIN
ISRAELI AGREEMENT ULTIMATELY TO WITHDRAW FROM THE WEST
BANK, HE WOULD HAVE IN HAND THE MAIN ELEMENT OF A COMPRE-
HENSIVE SETTLEMENT. IF SYRIA THEN REFUSED TO NEGOTIATE,
AND IF NO PALESTINIAN NEGOTIATOR PROVED WILLING, SADAT
COULD THEN EITHER TRY TO INVOLVE JORDAN IN A WEST BANK
SETTLEMENT OR CLAIM THAT HE HAD DONE EVERYTHING POSSIBLE
FOR PEACE AND MOVE TO A SEPARATE AGREEMENT. THIS
SCENARIO, HOWEVER, WOULD BE DEPENDENT ON ISRAELI WILLING-
NESS TO MAKE CONCESSIONS REGARDING THE WEST BANK.

5. SADAT MUST ALSO CONCERN HIMSELF WITH HIS ABILITY
TO SURMOUNT WHATEVER DOMESTIC OPPOSITION MIGHT BE GENERATED
IN EGYPT BY A MOVE TOWARD A SEPARATE DEAL. THE DEGREE
TO WHICH THIS OPPOSITION WOULD BE LIKELY TO INFECT THE
ARMED FORCES AND THUS ENDANGER HIS REGIME WOULD AGAIN
DEPEND LARGELY ON WHAT HAD PRECEDED HIS DECISION TO SEEK
A BILATERAL AGREEMENT. IN ESSENCE, OUR JUDGMENT AT THIS
POINT IS THAT IF SADAT CAN SHOW HE HAS RECEIVED CON-
CESSIONS FROM ISRAEL THAT ARE MEANINGFUL IN A PAN-ARAB
CONTEXT, ESPECIALLY AS REGARDS THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE, AND
IF SYRIA AND REPRESENTATIVE PALESTINIANS REFUSE TO JOIN
THE NEGOTIATIONS, SADAT COULD PROBABLY JUSTIFY TO THE
EGYPTIAN PEOPLE AND THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP AN ATTEMPT
TO STRIKE A SEPARATE DEAL. IN THE ABSENCE OF SUCH ISRAELI
CONCESSIONS, THE ABILITY OF ANY GOVERNMENT IN CAIRO TO
ADHERE OVER THE LONG-TERM TO A SEPARATE AGREEMENT IN THE

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FACE OF EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL OPPOSITION MUST BE DEEMED FAR MORE PROBLEMATICAL.

6. THE US MUST CONCERN ITSELF NOT ONLY WITH THE PROBABLE EFFECT OF A SEPARATE DEAL ON THE SADAT REGIME, BUT ALSO WITH ITS IMPACT ON THE STABILITY OF THE MIDDLE EAST AS A WHOLE. THERE ARE STRONG ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF THE PROPOSITION THAT A SEPARATE DEAL WOULD HAVE A DISRUPTIVE EFFECT ON BOTH FRONTS, THOUGH THIS WOULD BE AMELIORATED

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IN EGYPT AND AMONG MODERATE ARABS IF SADAT HAD ACHIEVED PERCEPTIBLE ISRAELI FLEXIBILITY ON PAN-ARAB ISSUES WHICH SYRIA AND THE PLO THEN REJECTED:

-- IT WOULD NOT BY ITSELF BRING PEACE TO THE MIDDLE EAST. THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT WOULD REMAIN A FOCAL POINT OF SERIOUS INSTABILITY BOTH BECAUSE ISRAEL WOULD BE THE TARGET OF ATTACK AND BECAUSE RIVAL ARAB FACTIONS WOULD USE THE ISSUE TO ATTACK EACH OTHER. WHILE THAT INSTABILITY REMAINS, EGYPT WILL REMAIN UNDER PRESSURE TO RENEGE ON ITS AGREEMENT, ESPECIALLY UNDER POST-SADAT LEADERSHIP.

-- WHILE THE REJECTIONISTS WOULD HAVE LIMITED CAPACITY TO THREATEN ISRAEL IN THE NEAR FUTURE, SYRIA MIGHT JOIN FORCES IRREVOCABLY WITH THE REJECTIONISTS AND COULD TRY TO RECONSTITUTE THE "NORTHERN TIER" OVER TIME AS A CREDIBLE MILITARY FORCE WITH WHICH TO RECOVER THE GOLAN HEIGHTS. SUCH A GROUPING MIGHT BE APPEALING TO SAUDI ARABIA AS AN ALTERNATIVE, IN TERMS OF POLITICAL AND MILITARY GRAVITY, TO CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR EGYPT.

-- RADICAL ELEMENTS AMONG THE REJECTIONISTS MIGHT UNDERTAKE A CAMPAIGN AGAINST MODERATE ARAB REGIMES WHICH WOULD AT LEAST FOMENT POPULAR DISCONTENT AND COULD LEAD TO THEIR REPLACEMENT BY MORE RADICAL GOVERNMENTS. THIS PRESSURE MIGHT FOCUS FIRST ON JORDAN AS A NECESSARY BASE FOR ACCELERATED PALESTINIAN EFFORTS TO REGAIN THE WEST BANK BY FORCE. SOUTHERN LEBANON WOULD BE FURTHER DEVELOPED AS A BASE FOR STRIKING ISRAEL.

-- THE SOVIET UNION, LACKING ANY FURTHER NEED TO PROTECT

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ITS STAKE IN A GENEVA CONFERENCE OR ANY PROSPECT OF A REASONABLE RELATIONSHIP WITH MODERATE ARABS, WOULD BE FREE TO ENCOURAGE REGIONAL INSTABILITY AND WOULD UTILIZE REJECTIONIST ELEMENTS TO THAT END.

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--A SPLIT IN THE ARAB WORLD BETWEEN REJECTIONISTS AND EGYPT COULD PROVIDE A POTENT RALLYING POINT FOR SADAT'S DOMESTIC OPPONENTS. DEPENDING ON THEIR STRENGTH, THEY COULD HAMPER SADAT'S OR ANY SUCCESSOR'S ABILITY TO FOLLOW THROUGH IN DEVELOPING THE KIND OF RELATION-SHIP ISRAEL WILL DEMAND.

--THE EGYPTIAN ECONOMY COULD WELL LOSE THE SUBSIDIES FROM SAUDI ARABIA ON WHICH IT HAS BECOME DEPENDENT. THE US WOULD BE EXPECTED, IN ADDITION TO PRESENT AID LEVELS, TO PICK UP MUCH OF THE SLACK.

--THE US, IF IT SUPPORTED AN ISRAEL-EGYPT AGREEMENT, WOULD FIND ITSELF ISOLATED FROM MOST OTHER ARAB STATES FOR SOME PERIOD OF TIME.

7. THERE ARE ALSO STRONG ARGUMENTS ON THE OTHER SIDE WHICH BOIL DOWN TO THE IDEA THAT AN EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI-SAUDI-US COALITION WILL PROVE TOO STRONG FOR REJECTIONIST FORCES TO OVERCOME, AND THAT THIS WILL, OVER TIME,FORCE THE OTHER PARTIES TO MAKE THEIR OWN DEALS WITH ISRAEL.

--THE SAUDIS WOULD BE MOST RELUCTANT TO SUPPORT A REJECTIONIST COALITION BECAUSE OF ITS ULTIMATE THREAT TO SAUDI STABILITY AND WOULD WISH TO SUPPORT SADAT LEST HE BE REPLACED BY A RADICAL REGIME IN CAIRO.

--THE SYRIANS, CONFRONTED BY THE PROSPECT OF BEARING THE FULL BRUNT OF ANY HOSTILITIES WITH ISRAEL, WOULD JOIN A REJECTIONIST COALITION ONLY WITH THE GREATEST

RELUCTANCE. ASSAD'S MAIN OBJECTION TO SADAT'S COURSE IS THAT SYRIA CANNOT HOPE TO REGAIN ITS TERRITORY OR WIN GAINS FOR THE PALESTINIANS BY ITSELF.

--THE PLO BY ITSELF IS IMPOTENT, ALTHOUGH THERE COULD BE A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN TERRORISM.

--THE SOVIET UNION IS NOT EAGER FOR AN INCREASE IN TENSIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST WHICH COULD LEAD TO RENEWED HOSTILITIES AND ARE CONCERNED LEST A POLITICAL CONFRONTATION WITH THE US IN THAT REGION EFFECT OTHER ASPECTS OF THE US-SOVIET RELATIONSHIP.

--DIFFERENCES AMONG THE REJECTIONIST STATES -- SUCH AS THE RIVALRY BETWEEN THE COMPETING WINGS OF THE BAATH PARTIES IN SYRIA AND IRAQ -- MAY BE DEEP ENOUGH TO PREVENT THEIR EFFECTIVE COOPERATION EVEN UNDER THE PROVOCATION OF A SEPARATE AGREEMENT.

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8. ANALYTICALLY, THE LIKELIHOOD OF A REJECTIONIST FRONT COALESCING AGAINST SADAT AND DISRUPTING REGIONAL STABILITY DEPENDS IN THE FIRST INSTANCE ON SYRIA'S DECISION TO PARTICIPATE. ASSAD THUS FAR SEEMS TO BE TEMPORIZING, WANTING NEITHER TO FOLLOW SADAT'S LEAD NOR TO JOIN FORCES WITH IRAQ AND LIBYA. IF SADAT CAN OBTAIN TANGIBLE CONCESSIONS FROM ISRAEL FOR EITHER THE PALESTINIANS OR SYRIA, IT WILL BE MUCH MORE DIFFICULT FOR ASSAD TO KEEP OUT OF THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS.

9. THE ULTIMATE SYRIAN POSITION, AS WELL AS THE POSITIONS OF SEVERAL OTHER ARAB STATES, WILL DEPEND LARGELY ON THE POSTURE OF SAUDI ARABIA. WHILE THE SAUDIS HAVE MADE CLEAR THEY ARE CONTINUING THEIR FINANCIAL SUP-
PORT FOR EGYPT, THEY COULD MOVE TO CURTAIL THAT SUPPORT
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IF SADAT SHOULD SEEK A SEPARATE DEAL. THEIR POSITION MIGHT WELL BE DIFFERENT, HOWEVER, SHOULD SYRIA AND APPRO-
PRIATE PALESTINIANS, GIVEN A CHANCE TO NEGOTIATE WITH AN ISRAEL PERCEIVED AS READY TO MAKE SERIOUS CONCESSIONS, FAIL TO SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY. THUS THE CRUCIAL ELEMENT IN SAUDI CALCULATIONS IS THE WILLINGNESS OF ISRAEL TO OFFER CONCESSIONS APPLICABLE TO SYRIA AND THE PALESTINIANS. WITHOUT SUCH CONCESSIONS, SAUDI PRESSURE ON SYRIA AND THE PALESTINIANS TO JOIN THE PEACE PROCESS WILL PROBABLY NOT OCCUR.

10. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE US. AN EGYPT-ISRAEL SETTLEMENT AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF A DEEP SPLIT BETWEEN EGYPT AND THE REJECTIONISTS WOULD, ON BALANCE, BE BETTER FROM THE US VIEWPOINT, IF SADAT CAN WEATHER THE STORM, THAN A CONTINUING NEGOTIATING IMPASSE. EVEN IN A TURBULENT MIDDLE EAST THE US WOULD HAVE PRESERVED ITS FUNDAMENTAL INTEREST IF IT WERE, IN EFFECT, ASSOCIATED WITH A COALITION OF ISRAEL, EGYPT, AND SAUDI ARABIA. WE DO NOT HAVE THAT MUCH AT STAKE IN THE OTHER MIDDLE EAST STATES THEMSELVES PROVIDED TURBULENCE THERE DOES NOT EITHER LEAD TO WAR OR OTHER CONDITIONS THAT FORCE THE MODERATES INTO A MORE RADICAL STANCE AS IT DID SAUDI ARABIA WITH THE OIL EMBARGO IN 1973-74 OR UNSEAT THEM. HOWEVER, A SEPARATE PEACE PROCESS WOULD RESOLVE FEW PROBLEMS AND LEAVE CONSIDERABLE INSTABILITY, AND ITS MAIN VALUE TO US WOULD BE AS A BREAKTHROUGH WHICH MIGHT LEAD THE WAY TO FURTHER AGREEMENTS ON OTHER FRONTS.

11. FROM THIS ANALYSIS EMERGE TWO POINTS:

(A) FIRST: WITHOUT DENIGRATING THE SADAT INITIATIVE, WE HAVE A CLEAR INTEREST--AS DOES SADAT HIMSELF-- IN ADHERING CLOSELY TO THE THEME THAT OUR OBJECTIVE REMAINS A COMPREHENSIVE PEACE SETTLEMENT AND THAT WE WELCOME ALL

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CONTACTS AMONG THE PARTIES THAT CONSTITUTE STEPS ALONG THAT ROUTE. IN THAT CONTEXT, WE SHOULD AVOID BEING DRAWN INTO A PUBLIC POSTURE OF RULING OUT A SEPARATE AGREEMENT. TO THE EXTENT THAT SADAT IS PERCEIVED AS DETERMINED TO CONTINUE DOWN THE NEGOTIATING PATH WITH ISRAEL AND AS ENJOYING BROAD DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT, SOME PRESSURE WILL BE GENERATED FOR THE SYRIANS AND PALESTINIANS TO REASSESS THEIR ANTI-SADAT POSITIONS. BUT WE SHOULD ALSO AVOID STATEMENTS THAT MIGHT BE INTERPRETED AS FORESHADOWING THAT THE US HAS ALREADY DECIDED TO SUPPORT A SEPARATE AGREEMENT. THE SOVIETS, THE SYRIANS, AND THE RADICAL ARABS ALL SUSPECT THAT WE ARE CONSPIRING WITH SADAT AND THE ISRAELIS TO BRING ABOUT A SEPARATE PEACE. SUCH SUSPICIONS CAN ONLY MAKE MATTERS MORE DIFFICULT FOR SADAT, EVEN THOUGH HE TENDS TO MINIMIZE THESE CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE MOMENT. IN OUR PRIVATE DIPLOMACY, WE SHOULD COMPORT OURSELVES IN A WAY THAT WILL NOT RESTRICT SADAT'S FREEDOM OF ACTION. WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO KEEP OUR CHANNELS OPEN TO THE SYRIANS AND THE SOVIETS, BUT WE SHOULD NOT BE WILLING TO PAY MUCH OF A PRICE FOR GETTING THEM BACK INTO THE NEGOTIATIONS AT THIS STAGE IF THINGS ARE MOVING ON THE EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI TRACK.

(B) SECOND: WE MUST KEEP IN MIND THAT AS SADAT PURSUES HIS NEGOTIATING STRATEGY THE US AND ISRAELI VIEWPOINT WILL NOT CONCIDE IN ALL RESPECTS. WHILE MANY ISRAELIS PAY LIP SERVICE TO THE GOAL OF A COMPREHENSIVE PEACE, THE PREVAILING STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT WITHIN ISRAEL IS LIKELY TO BE THAT IT IS IN ISRAEL'S INTEREST TO TAKE THE BIGGEST ARAB POWER OUT OF THE STRUGGLE AND TO LET THE CONFRONTATION CONTINUE WITH THE LESS POWERFUL ARABS. IN OTHER WORDS, THE REGIONAL CONDITIONS OF TURBULENCE

PRODUCED BY A SEPARATE EGYPT-ISRAEL PEACE WOULD BE OF LESS CONCERN TO ISRAEL THAN TO THE US. WHERE ISRAELI AND US INTERESTS DO COINCIDE, HOWEVER, IS IN THE FOLLOWING PROPOSITION: WHETHER OR NOT SADAT CAN PROCEED TO A BILATERAL AGREEMENT WHICH HAS REASONABLE PROSPECTS OF SURVIVING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES WILL DEPEND IN LARGE MEASURE ON HIS GETTING FROM ISRAEL PLAUSIBLE CONCESSIONS ON THE OTHER FRONTS. THE ISRAELIS WILL AGREE THESE WILL BE DESIRABLE, BUT IN THE END MAY WELL TAKE THE POSITION THAT EGYPT'S DESPERATE CIRCUMSTANCES WILL DRIVE SADAT TO A BILATERAL AGREEMENT IF NOTHING ELSE IS AVAILABLE. THIS COULD TURN OUT TO BE TRUE, BUT TO

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COUNT ON IT WOULD BE PLAYING A LONG-SHOT, AND OUR OWN
POLICY INTERESTS DICTATE THAT WE DISPUTE THIS ASSESSMENT
WITH THE ISRAELIS. CHRISTOPHER

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